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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000423

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: STAFFDEL TILLEMANN DISCUSSES ARMENIAN
GENOCIDE RESOLUTION, ARTICLE 301, IRAQ

REF: YEREVAN 194

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Kelly Degnan for reasons 1.4(b), (d)

1.(C) Summary. SFRC Majority Staff member Tomicah Tillemann visited Ankara between February 22-23 to discuss the Congressional Armenian genocide resolution (AGR), controversial Turkish Penal Code Article 301 (insulting "Turkishness"), and Turkey's views on Iraq. Tillemann delivered a clear message on the AGR: Turkey can change the dynamic of the debate in the U.S. Congress by taking bold steps such as opening the Turkish-Armenian border or amending Article 301. GOT interlocutors said it would be extremely difficult to open the border while politicians are courting nationalistic voters prior to May presidential and November parliamentary elections. Tillemann welcomed the news from Parliamentary Justice Committee Chairman Koksal Toptan that change on Article 301 is expected in the next several weeks. Significant amendment could help reshape the Congressional debate on the AGR, Tillemann said. On Iraq, Turkey's Special Envoy to Iraq Oguz Celikkol told Tillemann that preserving Iraq's territorial integrity is critical, while several Kurdish contacts espoused a federal system and increased ties between the GOT and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Celikkol asked the USG to urge the GOI to delay a Kirkuk referendum and take concrete steps against the PKK in northern Iraq. End Summary.

Armenian Genocide Resolution

2.(SBU) Tillemann discussed the AGR in separate meetings with ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) co-founder and Ankara MP Reha Denemec, DG for Bilateral Political Affairs Ambassador Resit Uman, and journalists and intellectuals who raise the "genocide" issue.

3.(C) Uman, Denemec, and Toptan each told Tillemann that passage of the AGR would damage U.S.-Turkey relations and hamstring GOT moves toward Turkey-Armenia reconciliation. Uman reviewed Turkey's discussions with Armenia on normalization of relations and the formation of a Joint Commission of Historians. He described his meeting with GOAM

Deputy FM Kirakossian in Istanbul during Hrant Dink's funeral as sincere and constructive but said that subsequent actions by GOAM officials, such as Foreign Minister Oskanian's op-eds, had made it more difficult for the GOT to maneuver. Taking bold moves, as Tillemann suggested, would be politically difficult during an election year, Uman said. Opening the border would allow opposition parties to vigorously accuse AKP of giving into outside pressure and of being weak on national security issues.

Article 301: Change is Imminent

4.(C) Justice Committee Chairman Toptan told Tillemann that revisions to Article 301 are likely to include changing the text from "insulting Turkishness" to "insulting the Turkish nation", requiring prosecutors to get clearance from a government authority (most likely an MOJ body) before launching a prosecution under the article, and lowering punishments under the article. AKP Ankara MP Denemec confirmed that the GOT is actively working on revisions. Tillemann welcomed the positive news, adding that such revisions would make it easier for supporters of strong Turkish-U.S. relations to vote against an AGR.

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Iraq and the PKK

5.(C) Turkey's Special Envoy for Iraq Oguz Celikkol told Tillemann that the GOT's primary concern is maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq; a splintering of the country would be a disaster for Iraq, the therQ is a mechanism to allow all communities to participate in determining the city's status. Celikkol agreed with Tillemann's point that Iraq's neighbors should play a larger role in helping to stabilize Iraq. On the PKK issue, Celikkol urged the USG to use its influence to convince the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to cease its support for the PKK and the GOI to take concrete steps such as arresting top PKK leaders.

6.(C) Kurdish contacts told Tillemann that the GOT could weaken the PKK by improving relations with the KRG. CHP Hakkari MP Esat Canan said that by increasing trade with the KRG, Turkey could significantly develop the economy in its southeastern region and weaken the PKK's ability to recruit new members. Canan acknowledged the difficulty of doing so in a climate where all parties, including his own, were chasing the nationalist vote at the expense of solving the Kurdish problem. Canan said the CHP's increasingly nationalist bent will likely cause him to withdraw from the party and run as an independent in the next election.

7.(C) Independent Kurdish politician and former Cizre mayor Hasim Hasimi told Tillemann the AKP understood the Kurdish problem but missed its window of opportunity last year to solve the issue by granting an amnesty for PKK members. Elections are now constricting the AKP's ability to act. Still, Hasimi's AKP sources told him that the party will attempt to capture the Kurdish vote from a weakened Democratic Society Party (DTP) by placing influential Kurds on its candidate list for the fall's parliamentary elections.

8.(U) This message has not been cleared by Staffdel Tillemann.

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